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C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 004465

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/31/2015

TAGS: PREL EG IZ

SUBJECT: SHAHRISTANI AND ZEBARI ON ARAB LEAGUE ENGAGEMENT

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires David M. Satterfield for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶11. (C) In an October 30 meeting with the Charge, First Deputy TNA Speaker Husayn al-Shahristani reflected on Amre Moussa's recent visit to Iraq. Shahristani indicated that both ITG officials in Baghdad and Ayatollah Sistani in Najaf pressed the SYG to establish Arab League representation in Iraq as a demonstration of support for the Iraqi people. Shahristani added that, even though the SYG claimed to accept the new Iraq, he continued to insist on the immediate withdrawal of coalition forces, the abandonment of de-Ba'athification, and the reinstatement of the previous Iraqi military. Such a platform is contradictory to professed Arab League recognition of "the new Iraq" and breeds mistrust, Shahristani commented. He added that Iraq's emerging democracy and Shia empowerment are a psychological shock to the Sunni Arab world and the Arab League. However, as long as the Arab League respects Iraq's sovereignty, Shahristani said it could have a positive role.

National Accord Conference

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¶12. (C) In a separate meeting, FM Zebari told the Charge he did not have high hopes for the Cairo preparatory meeting for the Moussa-proposed Iraqi National Accord Conference. Like Shahristani, Zebari could not confirm whom Arab League planned to invite to the Cairo event. Zebari hoped that the Arab League would invite members of Iraq's parliamentary blocs plus Sunnis from outside the Transitional National Assembly, with an expectation for 40-60 persons in attendance.

¶13. (C) Both Shahristani and Zebari expressed concern that the presence of outside parties, including "neighbors" and the Coalition, either at the Cairo preparatory or the Baghdad National Accord conferences would be problematic. Zebari commented that "outsiders" would only change the focus in a debate between the outside parties or between certain elements of the Iraqi participants (read Sunni hardliners) and "some outsiders" (read the US, given the issue of Coalition force presence). Both agreed that the National Accord conference should be held in Baghdad, after the upcoming elections, and after the formation of the new government, so that the conference could be seen as Arab League support of the new government, not intervention in Iraq's political process.

Representation in Iraq

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¶14. (C) Zebari told Charge that he pressed Amre Moussa to send an Arab League Ambassador to reside in Baghdad. Charge offered Zebari assistance with Arab League accommodation in the IZ.

Satterfield